DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 394 HE 017 200

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TITLE How to Get the Most Out of Your College Education.
INSTITUTION Association of American Publishers, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 13p.
AVAILABLE FROM Association of American Publishers, Inc., One Park Avenue, New York, NY 10016
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attendance; *College Freshmen; Courses; Decision Making; Higher Education; *Learning Motivation; *Notetaking; *Student Adjustment; Student Attitudes; *Study Habits; *Time Management

ABSTRACT

Advice for students entering college is provided. Overall topics include the challenges presented by college, the new freshman's interest in learning and study habits, course selection, class attendance, time management, and note taking. Specific topics that are briefly discussed are as follows: adjusting to many new experiences, the independence and maturity required in college, the resources of the college library, extracurricular activities, goal setting, the environment needed to study and read, grades, appraising one's strengths and weaknesses, sources of information about courses, scheduling classes, being prompt and prepared for classes, listening skills and asking questions during the class, relying on textbooks, making a personal work schedule, study time before and after each class, hours budgeted for each class, students with paid jobs, being organized, the style of writing notes from lectures, review of class notes, and doing textbook or reading assignments before class to minimize notetaking in class. (SW)

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This booklet is one in a series of AAP STUDENT SERVICE articles developed for the college textbook publishers to help students improve their use of study time and learning materials. Titles of the other booklets can be found on the back cover.

Studying is an essential aspect of education—representing a large investment in time and money. Like driving, athletics or any other activity, it requires practice and concentration. To study well it is important to know how to make maximum use of the books and facilities that are available. The enjoyment of learning and the retention of knowledge depends in great part on developing good study skills and learning habits.

Association of American Publishers, Inc.
One Park Avenue
New York, NY 10016

How to get the most out of your college education

by Mimi O'Hagan

You have worked hard to get to college. You no doubt have high hopes for enjoying it and getting an education which will influence and benefit your professional life. Statistics do indicate that college graduates have greater earning power and hold higher level executive jobs throughout life. And studies also indicate that men and women with college degrees enjoy more job satisfaction and healthier family lives.

But these advantages, desirable as they may be, can distract from the most important benefits of a college education. The real measure of a successful college career will not be the grades you earn, the degree you win, the job you get, but rather the intangible benefits of living and learning in an intellectual environment.

As a freshman you will be responsible for learning on your own and for getting the most out of classes, teachers, textbooks, research, study, libraries, and extracurricular activities. Your intellectual curiosity will be heightened and, hopefully, you will experience the satisfaction that comes with knowledge and with accomplishment. You will be meeting, mixing and learning with people whose opinions and attitudes differ from your own. You will be forced to make choices and to discipline yourself as never before in order to take full advantage of the wonderful opportunities that await you.

Are you ready for a challenge?

No doubt about it, college is totally different from high school. Chances are you will be on your own for the first time in your life. As a freshman you will realize right away that you have a lot of freedom, and a lot of choices to make. The structured schedule of high school classes and activities will be a thing of the past. In college you are going to be in complete charge of your own time and activities.

Be prepared for some anxiety, confusion, homesickness and insecurity. All of that is natural, and most of your new classmates will be encountering similar feelings.

You will be adjusting to many new experiences. You might be separated from family and old friends. Perhaps you will be living in a new environment with a group of strangers who come from a variety of backgrounds. Classmates' views on studying, sex, religion, politics, drugs and drinking will not always agree with yours. You will probably no longer have parents guiding you or telling you what to do. Your classmates will be competing with you for higher grades. There is likely to be some financial pressure because of the sacrifices called for on the part of your

parents. You might have to work to help support yourself. You are probably on your own for the first time — responsible for your own living quarters, meals, and, above all, studying.

If you are prepared to meet these new life situations, chances are you will find them exhilarating. But you'll need to pace yourself — to take each new experience in stride. Above all, trust yourself. Have confidence in the fact that you've made it to college and have the capabilities to succeed.

Are you interested in learning?

Surveys indicate that many incoming freshmen will not receive an Associate or Bachelor's degree. Obviously college is not easy. But, surveys also show that students who do earn a degree are those who start off freshman year with good study habits.

Your attitude toward learning is going to be a key factor in determining whether or not you get the most out of college. Most professors agree that students who have the motivation, or desire, to learn will succeed. If you have the interest in acquiring knowledge, you will enjoy learning and will be willing, if not eager, to study.

Classes and study will differ greatly from high school. To a large extent you will be choosing the courses you want to take in view of your own learning goals. Your daily schedule will be self-made, not predetermined by others. You'll be responsible for buying your own textbooks and using them intelligently to get good grades.

Acquaint yourself early with the rich resources of the college library. Ask the librarian to show you how to use the card catalog, the central resource for finding books you will need to research class assignments. Get to know the reference room with its store of encyclopedias, almanacs, indexes, government publications and, sometimes, old and rare books. Many libraries today also offer a selection of audio-visual materials including tapes, records and microfilm. Browse through the periodicals room and see what variety of magazines, newspapers, and professional journals are available for your study and reading pleasure.

Extracurricular activities will provide you with a wide choice of non-academic opportunities. The campus newspaper, glee club, team sports, outing club or student government are a few of the many things that might appeal to you. Each offers a chance to develop an interest, a talent and leadership qualities. But beware of signing up too soon in freshman year for non-academic activities that might eat into your more important study or job responsibilities.

College life is a total environment — intellectual, social and physical. All aspects are interrelated and can contribute one to another. It is important to know how to use your time so you can enjoy a variety of activities each day.

Above all, remember you're in college to learn. Yes, you'll make friends and have fun too. But tuition is expensive and the reason you're there is to get an education. So decide the first day to get the most out of it in the months and years ahead.

Set goals for yourself. Every term you'll have to make choices about what classes to take, how hard you're going to study, what extra-curricular activities you'll participate in, and what friends to see. If you establish priorities for all of these, you will make better use of your energies and abilities.

Studying and learning is hard work — but so is backpacking, mountain climbing or playing varsity football. The secret to academic achievement is going to rest in your determination to succeed and in your willingness to study consistently.

No one can learn for anyone else. If you don't make the most of learning opportunities, or flunk courses, you'll only have yourself to blame. Don't find reasons why your instructors, roommates, friends, or parents were the cause of your getting an "F".

Instructors, courses and textbooks only present the material from which you can learn. It is up to you to digest it. The location and atmosphere you choose for studying will influence your ability to learn and remember.

Every student needs a quiet place to study and read, from the first week of college to the last. Whether it is the library or your own room, you will learn better if you are away from distractions, interruptions and noise. Many learning specialists even recommend that a student's desk face a blank wall.

Professors want students to learn and to get good grades. Most college instructors welcome an opportunity to meet with their students, to answer questions and to exchange ideas. Introduce yourself and get to know your teachers. They will respect your interest and will realize you are serious about learning.

Grades in college are not the only mark of success. Of course, they are important to earning the degree. But, in the long run, it will be your ability to learn, and your interest in continuing to learn, that will benefit you most throughout life.

Don't get discouraged or anxious when you find some work difficult. College isn't meant to be easy. If it is, you've chosen courses below your capabilities. It is normal that some courses demand more perserverance and hard work than others.

If, however, you are feeling continual pressure or anxiety about college, there are many resources available to help you. Seek advice from the Dean of Students, the college counselling center, the dorm resident, or your instructors. They are all there to assist you. Don't be too proud or too shy to ask for help.

Appraise your own weaknesses and strengths. Set out to profit from your abilities and to improve your weak points. You are probably going to be in college for two or four years, and it might be the only time in your life when you can concentrate most of your energies on yourself. Learning how to channel these energies productively will help you get the most out of every experience.

Are you willing to work?

Signing up for classes is only one of the unfamiliar tasks required of you soon after arrival at college. Finding your way around the campus, meeting faculty and classmates, arranging your room if you're away from home, attending orientation sessions, buying textbooks and supplies, or opening a bank account, are all chores you'll have to accomplish within the first few days. It's important to undertake each task in order of priority.

Selecting and registering for the right courses should take priority over other activities. Since you're in college to get an education above all, it's important that you initially devote your energies to your class schedule.

Selecting Classes

Here are some helpful hints to consider:

Study the catalog carefully. Know what courses are offered. How many are required and how many hours will they take? What electives are available and which ones interest you most?

Ask other students the names of the teaching instructors they thought were the best. Look up these professors' names in the catalog and see if you can sign up for one of their courses.

Take a light load the first term, fourteen or fifteen hours only. This will give you time to adjust to college-level work.

Evaluate your academic strengths and weaknesses. Don't sign up for more than one course that you know will be especially difficult for you.

Select courses in a variety of subjects. This will give you basic general knowledge and can help you decide later what area to major in.

Choose classes that take place during your best hours. Some students are "morning people," others are more alert in the afternoon. If you find it hard to get going before nine, don't sign up for an 8 a.m. course.

Evaluate the wisdom of scheduling classes back-to-back. If you have one right after another there will be no time for review, preparation, or a break in between.

Register early after you have made a careful course selection. Some classes have limited enrollments. Be ready with second choices in case a class is full.

Attending Classes

More independent study is required of college students than high school students. On average, one hour of class requires two or three hours of study. Before classes begin here are some things to consider:

Get to the first class in plenty of time. Instructors usually start off their courses with an overview of the term's work. They will probably also hand out a "syllabus" or course outline and give directives about required and recommended textbooks.

Classes are apt to be large, so sit in the front where you will have fewer distractions and be able to hear and be heard more easily.

Be punctual for every class. Instructors often stress the most important things first. They also notice which students arrive late and might interpret this as lack of interest.

Bring all the necessary learning aids to class. Check before you leave your room that you have the texts, workbooks, study guides, class notes, pens, pencils, and any other items that may be needed.

Listen carefully to everything your instructors say. What they emphasize and the questions they ask will give you an indication of what they consider important. Some instructors may lecture continuously. It is easy to start daydreaming. Keep alert and take good notes. You can be sure most instructors notice which students are paying attention.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Instructors respect students who show an interest. Nearly all teachers set aside two or three hours a week for consultation. When there is not enough time in class to ask questions make an appointment.

If you find a course too difficult after two or three classes think about switching. Discuss it with your instructor, dean or adviser. It's best to be realistic and make the change early, so one course doesn't demand too much of your time or energy. You can then substitute a more appropriate course.

Relying On Textbooks

Textbooks contain essential course information, reinforce class lectures, complete class notes, give visual aids and data, provide the material needed for adequate review and exam preparation and can be a valuable reference for the future. Eight out of ten instructors teaching large freshman and sophomore courses assign texts to support course content.

Students cannot expect to cover course work without having these basic learning tools accessible for daily study. By reading them carefully, underlining the important ideas and facts, as well as making your own notes in the margins, textbooks can become your reliable study companions.

Professors usually give clear-cut instructions about which assigned books are required, recommended or optional. If you have any questions, be sure to ask the instructor so you can buy the books you need to pass the course.

Buy your textbooks early so you have them for the first assignment. When you go to purchase your books you may find the "bookrush" at the college store similar to the line for the new science-fiction movie. Don't let this deter you. A few weeks later there may be no copies left when the first exam is fast approaching!

Do you use your time wisely?

One of the most dramatic contrasts between high school and college is that freshmen find they are totally responsible for their own time. Gone are the days when your schedule for classes, sports, meals or rest was dictated by someone else. Your parents, teachers or coaches will no longer be telling you when and where to go.

In college your ability to manage your time well will greatly influence the grades you will earn. Learning how to budget your time carefully will be as important as budgeting your cash. Just as you know how much money you have to spend each year, you'll have to start off each term with a work schedule that makes productive use of all your available time.

Each weekday should include a balanced combination of activities: class, study, exercise, sleep, nutritious meals, personal chores and, perhaps, a job. Weekends, too, should be scheduled, with some study time built in.

It's easy to lose an hour at the snack bar, to postpone signing up for classes, to be late buying the required books, to skip study before and after classes, and ultimately, not to be prepared for exams.

Experience shows that intelligent use of time in college requires a personal work schedule. A weekly time chart, divided into half-hour segments, can serve as a framework for daily activities. It can also be indispensable in helping you plan the whole term. Here are some guidelines for the productive use of each week's 168 hours.

Weekly Schedule

Activity	Hours	
Classes:	15	
Study:	38	(average 2½ for each class)
Eating:	14	(2 daily for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snack)
Exercise:	7	(one hour each day to keep fit)
Sleep:	53	(most people require an average 7-8 hours)
Wasted time:	7	(let's hope no more than 1 hour daily)
Personal chores:	10	(this should allow time for laundry, dressing, shopping and cleaning)
Free time:	10	(for researching, writing term papers, studying difficult subjects, extra-curricular activities or a special weekend)
Social time:	14	(for friends, a good movie, a bestseller or a little disco)
TOTAL:	168 hours	

Time should be included for study before and after each class — even if it is only ten minutes. This will allow for the preparation and review needed for every class period. Before the class starts you'll want to look over your textbook underlinings and the notes you have made on the assigned chapters. After class you will want to review your notes immediately so that you can clarify them if necessary. "Forgetting" takes place most rapidly right after something is learned, so this review helps you remember the material.

At least two hours of study should be budgeted for each class hour. It is advisable to schedule part of this time shortly before the class begins. In this way you'll remember what you have been studying and will be prepared for class.

Study periods should normally be one hour long, followed by a ten minute break. Your ability to concentrate will greatly affect your ability to learn. Experts find that most people need a change of pace after an hour's concentration.

Wasted minutes add up quickly to wasted hours. Be stingy with your time and use it in productive portions. A half-hour of exercise is far better than three, ten-minute interruptions or idle daydreams. Notice how short chats, snacks or study interruptions eat into your day if you are not careful.

Students with paid jobs often use time better than those who don't work. They know the value of work and how much they earn each hour. But for those who do hold down jobs, it is recommended that they work only 14 to 20 hours a week. Otherwise they will not have enough hours and energy left to schedule sufficient study time for each class.

When planning your term schedule, give thought to the summer session. In order to get the most out of college you may want to use these three months for earning more money, class credits, or gaining work experience in your field of speciality.

Neatness and organization can also help you save time. If you get in the habit of putting your textbooks on the same shelf, your notes in one place, and keeping your desk tidy, you won't waste time looking for things. Have everything in one place so when you sit down to study your pens, fresh paper, and everything else you need is at hand.

Force yourself to do the hardest work first. You'll be fresher and won't find fatigue an excuse for not undertaking the difficult subjects. You'll also be proud of yourself.

When your class schedule is final, make a trial schedule for each day with all the half-hours indicated from 7:30 a.m. to midnight. For the first two weeks note on it each night how you did spend your time. By the third week of classes you can **make a final schedule that realistically reflects your own needs and work habits.** Keep a copy of this work schedule on the top of your desk and another on the inside cover of your notebook.

Do you know how to take good class notes?

An important factor in getting good grades will be your ability to take clear, well-organized class notes. Most freshmen find the typical college lecture a totally new experience. In the smaller give-and-take style of high school, class notes were not critical. Now you will have to get into the swing of notetaking. It will take practice, like other good study habits.

Listening carefully to the instructor's lecture and writing down the important points is the key to successful notetaking. The process of listening and writing at the same time will also help you understand. A few basic techniques can help.

The purpose of class notes is to record the instructor's lesson in a manner that will allow you to review and understand the material afterwards. Your objective, therefore, is to outline the main and supporting ideas and facts so that they are clear and understandable.

Write rapidly in your own form of shorthand. Don't try to take down everything — keep to the main points. Develop your own style of abbreviating and condensing the important data. Some people leave out vowels, for instance, or use only the first syllable, and omit articles and obvious verbs. Common abbreviations and symbols found in most dictionaries can often be of great help.

Instructors' teaching methods will differ. You'll have to be alert to each one's style and organization. Often they start each class with an overview or outline and use it as a framework for their lecture. This, of course, is another reason for being punctual.

Outlines, diagrams or lists that instructors write on the board are usually important. It is a good idea to record these in your notebook, unless you know that the same material is already covered in your textbook.

Indenting and spacing will help make your notes more readable. Start a new line out to the left for an important heading. Indent subheads under this and so on.

Start a new page for each class, with the date and topic heading the page. When a new major topic or division is introduced, begin another new page so that you will have enough room to record the appropriate material under it.

A lined 8½ x 11" notebook is recommended. On the front cover you can paste your work schedule, as well as your name, address and phone number in case you ever misplace it. You can keep all your class notes, and the instructor's handouts, in this one book by tabbing sections for each course. You can also add or delete notes or fresh paper as you need to. Most students, by the way, find that notes made in pen are much more legible and durable than those in pencil.

It is best to write on the right-hand pages only. You can then make your own study, review or textbook notes on the left-hand pages.

Jot down questions as they occur to you in class and hold them for

the appropriate moment. They might be answered or become unimportant in a few minutes. But if not, you'll want to have them answered either in class or later.

Be alert to the instructor's tone, emphasis or questions. These may be clues to things that will appear on an exam. For example, if Professor Smith says, "Five important reasons for the treaty were . . . ." or "Remember now, . . . ", you can be sure those are things to be recorded.

Class lectures and textbook assignments do not always parallel each other. Your class notes will reflect the instructor's approach to the topic, but you might find it helpful to make additional notes from your textbook on the left-hand page across from your class notes.

Design your notetaking system so that you have sufficient room to record the instructor's material, your reading notes AND your review notes on one page or two opposite pages.

Remember, review your class notes as soon as possible after the session has ended. In this way you'll be able to correct, clarify or fill-in where necessary. This review time will also be critical in helping you remember the class material when it is fresh in your mind.

One style of notetaking, developed at Cornell University, has been very helpful to students. On every right-hand page, draw a vertical line from top to bottom, 2½ inches in from the left side. In class use the large 6 inch column on the right for recording the lecture material. After class and during study times, use the smaller left-hand column for making your own review notes. By marking down the key word, idea or fact, it can help you remember what you are studying and help you review for exams. Some students find it helpful to use a colored marker or pen during review to underline the important words or phrases.

Completing textbook or reading assignments before each class will help minimize notetaking in class. You will know whether the material under discussion is in the text or not. You will already have underlined the important ideas in the book, so you won't have to duplicate these points when the instructor makes them. Instead of taking down these same facts write "refer to textbook chapter."

Typing or rewriting notes is normally a waste of time. If they are legible, accurate and complete it is much more productive to spend your time reviewing the notes, reading your text and keeping up every day and every week with your studies.

College should be an exhilarating educational and personal experience. It can dramatically affect and benefit your attitude, your abilities and your future achievements. But, essentially, the extent of your success or failure in getting the most out of college will be up to you.

Good luck!

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